

Avoiding Sex with People Living with HIV despite Understanding U=U: Factors Associated with Sexual Avoidance Attitudes among Multicultural GBMSM in Australia

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Background:

Ten years after Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) was introduced, HIV stigma remains common. Even among people who understand that someone with an undetectable viral load (UVL) cannot transmit HIV, some avoid sex with people living with HIV (PLHIV).

Methods:

We examined factors associated with avoidance attitudes towards sex with PLHIV among multicultural gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM), using national data from the 2025 GLAAM+ survey (N=956). The analysis focused on non-PLHIV participants who correctly identified U=U and answered a question about avoiding sex with PLHIV. We used bivariable screening and multivariable logistic regression, adjusting for age, duration of residence in Australia, LGBTQ+ community connection (based on engagement with LGBTQ+ networks, public events/festivals and informal queer social spaces), knowledge of local HIV/STI-friendly services, perceived unfair treatment by mainstream Australians, and PrEP use.

Results:

Among 399 non-PLHIV respondents who understood U=U, 117 (29.3%) agreed they would avoid sex with PLHIV. In bivariable screening, age group, duration in Australia, LGBTQ+ community connection, knowledge of local HIV/STI-friendly services, perceived unfair treatment by mainstream Australians and PrEP use met the $p \leq .10$ threshold and entered the multivariable model. In adjusted analyses, only age group and LGBTQ+ community connection remained associated: age 18–29 years versus 40+ (aOR 2.11, 95% CI 1.07–4.16; $p = .031$) and fewer LGBTQ+ community connections versus two or more (no connection: aOR 1.98, 95% CI 1.10–3.58; $p = .023$; one connection: borderline significant, aOR 1.70, 95% CI 0.97–2.97; $p = .062$).

Conclusion:

Avoidance attitudes towards sex with PLHIV were not uncommon among participants who understood U=U, suggesting that knowledge alone may not reduce reluctance to

have sex with PLHIV. Future efforts may need to consider the complexity of sexual decision-making, while strengthening social connection across diverse LGBTQ+ settings to help translate U=U knowledge into more affirming attitudes, particularly among younger multicultural GBMSM.

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